Forum: Movement in the Americas

Introduction: Fugitivity, Futurity, and a Moving Pedagogy

Sarah Brophy
McMaster University

Six scholars from Brazil, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the United States have contributed essays to this conversation tracing movement as an underlying theme in the literatures of the Americas that can be revealed by comparative readings. We focus our analyses on auto/biographical narratives and constructions of the self in relation to historic and contemporary movements, whether forced or chosen. The multivoiced format extends and reflects transnational discourses on life writing and generates an assessment of the role of movement in auto/biographical literatures of the Western Hemisphere.

For us, "movement" refers not only to people on the move, to the biopolitical mass mobilization and management of populations in distinct and interrelated phenomena including migration, diaspora, slavery, dispossession, incarceration, and border fortification. It also points to the singular, smaller-scale, sometimes almost imperceptible actions and traces of bodies, texts, images, and sounds "in motion," as black visual studies scholar Tina Campt encourages us to listen for; to the circulation and remediation of life texts across borders and through zones of cultural and political power and disempowerment, as Gillian Whitlock emphasizes in her work on life writing in a global frame (3-4); and to the possibilities of concerted collective action and solidarity that are motivated by dreams of social and political transformation (*OED*).

Our thematic and theoretical focus on a multidimensional concept of movement is precipitated by a transnational turn in the contemporary field of auto/biography studies. As scholars working in this rapidly transforming interdisciplinary field, we perceive a deep intellectual and social need for intrahemispheric intellectual connections and are committed to building the networks and infrastructure necessary to support them. The contributors to this Forum are active members of the "Americas"

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branch of the International Auto/Biography Association, a regional chapter founded in 2013 at an international symposium in San Juan, Puerto Rico, which has since convened two biennial meetings, one at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 2015, and another at York University, Toronto, in 2017. As our publications to date attest, a founding insight of this trans-American collaboration is that "the historic or contemporary movement of peoples to, in, and from the Americas—forced or chosen—underlies the ways in which identity is constructed in this contested space. Such an understanding of the importance of movement to narratives of the western hemisphere leads to considerations of belonging steeped in the strata of performativity, relationality, and intersubjectivity" (Chansky, "Moving" 7).

Mindful as we pursue this work of the dangers of a "new homogeneity" (Chansky, "Reading Beyond Borders" 15), we have been working towards a "sustained comparative analysis of lives narrated in the Americas" (8) and are endeavouring to heed our colleague and fellow steering committee member Sidonie Smith's call for a deep "resituating of relationality" in the wide-ranging intellectual and activist work of engaging "the cultures of the autobiographical across the Americas" (35). In this Forum on "Movement in the Americas," we consider how particular instances and/or traditions of self-inscription—ranging from slave narratives, ethnographies, experimental poetry, novels, memoirs, poetry, public debates about cultural memory, serial autobiography, and visual diaries—can be understood as responding to historical and contemporary currents of power and dispossession and, more specifically, as wresting underlying mutability into new forms, practices, and rhetorics that foster resistance. We engage, in turn, in a set of shared but variegated self-reflections on the ethical, pedagogical, and political vocabularies and critical practices necessitated by lives and texts "on the move" in the Americas.

The Forum opens with two essays in the field of Black Studies that illuminate the relationship amongst these different scales and dimensions—and indeed contestations—of movement. The persistence and creativity of movement in the face of oppression and displacement is compellingly illustrated by Joycelyn K. Moody's emphasis on "fugitivity" and "shape-shifting" as the core operations of African American women's autobiographies since the eighteenth century. As Moody indicates, the traditions and the emergent modalities of black women's writing not only "choreograph" ways of eluding and exceeding the harsh glare of state and racialized surveillance, but also generate embedded maps and codes, transmitting them as resources for future escapees to follow. We situate the significance of Moody's intervention in relation to the artists, orators, creative writers, historians, and critics in Black Studies who are engaged in the work of remembering transoceanic passages, forced migrations, violence, and exploited labour. This body of intellectual and imaginative work testifies to the ways in which movement is nonetheless varied and manifold, never stops entirely as long as there is breath and imagination, and is not reducible to the logic of capital, empire, or nation that would treat bodies as moveable or disposable economic units. M. Jacqui Alexander, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley,

Stephano Harney, and Fred Moten, amongst others, call us to reimagine "the hold" of the slave ship. Even as it confined, dehumanized, and transported enslaved people, write Harney and Moten, "the hold's terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common," in turn prompting dynamics of "improvisation" and the capacity to "feel [and to feel for] each other" (97-98). In the teeth of dispossession, there emerge new relations of being together characterized by care, desire, invention, and transnational connectivity.

Following Moody's lead and bringing questions about the "shape" of fugitivity to an essential case study, Eva C. Karpinski's engagement with M. NourbeSe Philip's experimental poetic text *Zong!* offers a meditation on how Philip's explosive multilingualism reshapes the materiality of the book. Drawing together Sylvia Wynter's philosophical insights into multiple "genres of the human" that exceed the model of Enlightenment Man with Catherine Malabou's thinking about the world, and its bodies and texts, as fundamentally "plastic" and hence radically amenable to remodelling, Karpinski argues that in "the plasticity of Philip's multilingual performance in *Zong!* lies in the ability of language to stretch, interact, amplify, and expand temporal and spatial contexts." *Zong!* comes into view here as a text that accomplishes the impossible as it plumbs the depths of the violence, death, and dispossession of the Middle Passage while simultaneously establishing its "expansive memory" as the grounds for a radical spiritual and political repossession of self and of kin (Alexander 288, 298).

Resituating the relationship of formal innovation to the problem of sustaining embodied and political existence in a Latin American context, Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle's paper considers how "mimicry, elasticity, and other adaptive methods of survival" feature in women's autobiographies of twentieth-century dictatorships in Chile and Nicaragua. As autobiography theorist Leigh Gilmore has written in her recent book *Tainted Witness* in reference to the struggles that women from Anita Hill onward have faced in having their individual and community-based stories of violation, harassment, and oppression recognized as truthful in the US context, "testimony moves," constantly seeking new avenues for a fair hearing, "but judgment sticks," weighing down women's stories and invalidating them (5). What Ortiz-Vilarelle's discussion offers to the *#MeToo* movement, which challenges the dynamic of silencing-through-tainting that Gilmore points out, is a salutary lesson in irrepressibility, fierce determination, and inventiveness. For, even though women writing under autocracies in Latin America have faced the violent suppression of their political speech, in addition to what Gilmore has identified as "a deep reservoir of bias" (5) stemming from entrenched misogyny and patriarchy, these Chilean and Nicaraguan writers' extant bodies of work show that it is possible to find ways to encode, transmit, and make resonant feminist testimonies in the direst of totalitarian political circumstances. The survival of these writers' and activists' political "DNA" through the forms of subterfuge identified by Ortiz-Vilarelle may give feminists in other parts of the Americas today hope that our movements can endure in the face of organized backlash and suppression.

As we contemplate such possibilities for bearing witness and enacting radical forms of remodelling, self-possession, and transmission, some of the pressing ethical and practical questions that concern us as scholars of auto/biography in the Americas now are: what happens when archives of fugitive or adaptive movement are remediated and traverse interpretive contexts? Do these mutable, beneath the radar struggles and tactics get ignored or misread in frameworks that prioritize "free subjectivity" as an achievement within an otherwise oppressive economic and political formation, as Moody emphasizes? In her formulation of contemporary autobiography as "*in transit*: on the move in unpredictable passages across cultures, vital to the imaginative work of modern subjectivity and struggles for a place to speak in the public sphere" (4; emphasis in original), Whitlock takes care to warn of auto/biography's status as a "soft weapon," one that is all too readily "used to mask privilege and to reify dominant social relations, and the *doxa* of globalization" (7; emphasis in original). Laura J. Beard's contribution to our Forum shows how these risks of cooptation manifest in complicated ways when the state elicits testimony in the name of building a new, hopefully more just "common memory" regarding settler colonialism and in particular the legacies of the residential school system in Canada, which fractured Indigenous families, communities, and languages. Responding to critiques by Indigenous scholars of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Beard wonders: Will a new "common memory" be oriented to a "pacifying" agenda that "absolves" colonial injustices in advance? What would motivate settlers to "engage respectfully" in ways that honour the "generosity" and the "models" for "ethical work" conveyed by Indigenous women's "moving words"?

There are no easy answers here. The legacies of Eurocentric, settler-colonial domination (linguistic, geographical, cultural, and economic) continue, often implicitly, to circumscribe how texts that trace and archive movement are taken up. However, as Ricia Anne Chansky's contribution to our Forum suggests, attention to readerly location—that is, the new and older patterns of movement that constitute and reconstitute the places that readers inhabit, traverse, and imagine or claim as "home"—can be a path towards a new epistemology and pedagogy for stories and archives of movement. Drawing on her experience living and working in Puerto Rico since 2008 and witnessing the impact of economic crisis on the island's social fabric, Chansky elucidates that readers' positions and practices are not as stable as we might think they are, but rather are constituted "by the shifting conditions surrounding textual lives." After all, observes the educational philosopher Maxine Greene, "the events that make up aesthetic experiences are events that occur within and by means of the transactions within our environment" (382). Like Chansky, Greene makes the case that there is a vital connection between reflecting on the "processes of becoming who we are," *where* we are, and the insight that "reality depends on perspective, that its construction is never complete, and that there is always more" (382). These arguments emerging from within life writing and education studies coincide with the insights of globalization scholars including Diana Brydon and Leigh Jenco, who

propose reconceptualizing the local as "a particularized site for the circulation of knowledge" (Jenco, qtd. in Brydon 28). Attending to where and how we dwell, or what Brydon terms "mobile localities," can bring new thought to places' material and affective layers, to their multiple, contested histories, and to their inescapable relation to hemispheric and global flows and the bearing down of power on people's everyday lives. Self-reflexive rereading grounded in this new approach to locality as constituted in and through movement might, to return to Moody's and to Beard's respective calls to be attentive to the premises of what we are reading "for," attune scholars and students to pick up on and be moved by some of the subtler motions, traditions, and forms of fugitivity and survival: the hovering image, the resonant interval (Campt). These are underlying dynamics of resistance and contestation that liberal and neoliberal frameworks, with their focus on more recognizeable forms of self-actualization, freedom, and agency, might rush past, surveil, punish, or censor.

In the essay that completes the Forum's sequence, Sergio Barcellos addresses diary keeping as a diasporic material practice in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, offering keen insights into the reciprocal shaping of multimedial forms, embodiment, and the travelling self. As Barcellos's analysis of Brazilian art collector and lawyer Joaquim Paiva's *128 Diários* archive and related small-press artist's book suggests, while bodies on the move may bespeak transitoriness and disorder, they are nonetheless motivated to find or make containers to carry forward the imprint of their lived experience. Comprising a material-virtual "second body," Paiva's ongoing diary project, which started as an activity suggested by a counsellor in a group therapy setting, "gathers" the visual and material evidence of his embodied lives over time, retaining them as resources for remembering that exceed the bounds of the therapeutic arc of recovery (Barcellos, in this volume). If recent manifestations of diaries are closely linked to the premium that contemporary therapeutic culture places on the writing self as labouring towards authenticity, as Kylie Cardell has suggested in her 2014 survey of the genre (28-29), then Barcellos's reading of Paiva's migrations helps grasp how the creation of a large-scale diary archive that constitutively resists complete publication may be interpreted as a radicalized reclaiming of self-documentation for and by bodies on the move, a retention of privacy based in the ongoing, endless of intimacy with one's own travelling body. We can constellate (that is, connect, but not conflate) Barcellos's analysis of Paiva's radical auto-archiving with Karpinski's discussion of the refusal of containment and the stretching of form in Philips's *Zong!*, which, in a contrastingly collective, biographical, and radical register, shows how the technology of the printed book can be reshaped in ways to tenderly hold and care for both the millions of Black lives lost to the slave trade and slavery's terrible violence, and the suffering, the persistence, and the knowledge of the living.

As a coordinated project of its own, conducted across national, geographic, and linguistic boundaries, this Forum models possibilities for new networks of thought about trans-American lives and life narratives, and the multiple "movements" that both constitute and remake them. By attending to how innovations in form and in

reading practices register movement differently and make space for testimony, for dwelling, and for arcs of escape, the essays in this Forum collectively, and in and through their specific histories and locations, enunciate what my colleagues and I propose to name a "moving pedagogy." This "moving pedagogy" has three related implications for how we conceptualize and practice scholarly activity in the emerging field of trans-American studies in auto/biography. Most tangibly, the contributors each attend to how "experiential knowledge and localized subjectivity," as Chansky puts it, change the interpretive and pedagogical frameworks we bring to engaging with stories and visual/material archives of migration and displacement. Just as important, the papers share an underlying concern with futurity, with how testimonial traces of movement might endure, or be transmitted, into the future, exercising potentially transformative effects; or, indeed, they are concerned with how the pursuit of a future necessitates finding ways to bypass the normative and "sticky" modes of judgement that would invalidate or endanger them (Gilmore 5), and, in turn, with reflecting on the relationship between auto/biographies of movement and the hopes autobiographers and their readers might have for a (different) future. Finally, we highlight the importance of movement's intentional and collective valences (as in music and dance, and activist social movements), emphasizing how and why selves and bodies come together (assemble, choreograph, extend, and expand themselves) in manifold textual-material forms of fugitivity, resistance, and survival.

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